

Testimony for HB 6616: “An Act Concerning Expansion Of Husky Health Benefits To Those Ineligible Due To Immigration Status”

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Mary Elizabeth Smith and I am from New Haven, CT. I am also the Development and Programs Director at Make the Road CT. I stand in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of Husky Health Benefits to those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status”. Expanding access to HUSKY up to age 26 regardless of immigration status is an important step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve. But our work doesn’t end with expanding access up to age 26; we need to open access to HUSKY and healthcare to all immigrants of any age, including parents and adults.

Make the Road CT is an intergenerational member-led community-based organization working to build power in immigrant, Latinx, and working-class communities in Connecticut. We have offices in Bridgeport and Hartford and have more than 1,000 members, the majority of whom are a part of undocumented and mixed status immigrant families. According to a survey we did of our members in 2020, nearly 75% of those surveyed stated they did not have any health insurance. This lack of access to insurance leads to negative consequences for immigrant families but also for society as a whole. Immigrant families often do not seek medical care for routine check-ups or preventative care, out of fear of high medical bills. In addition, other more significant illnesses often go untreated or are dealt with using home remedies. One of our survey respondents stated, “[The pandemic] has affected us psychologically and we have gotten sick but [...] we have been afraid to go to the hospital due to the bills we have on top of us”.

Many members of Make the Road will be sharing their stories with you today during the public hearing, so you do not need to hear their stories from me. But I would love to share a bit about my family. I am part of a mixed status family, like so many of our members. I have three children: my youngest is a U.S. Citizen, my middle child is a dual citizen with both Bolivian and U.S. citizenship, and my oldest daughter has Bolivian citizenship. You might be thinking to yourself, wow that sounds complicated and atypical, and I would tell you that while it is complicated, having a mixed status family in CT is more common than you might think. And that when kids are part of families that involve forced migration, details as seemingly simple as which side of the border they were born on and when make a huge difference in their lives.

My oldest daughter was 2 when I met her and is now 18, so we are bound by life conditions though not by blood and not by legal ties (which in this case is a disadvantage to her). While she is fortunate enough to be in the process of becoming a legal resident, many do not have that option. And even though she is currently in that process, she will still have to wait 5 years before she is able to access Husky in our state. She lives with her other parent and is currently juggling both school and a part time job to help pay for her health care costs, bills and incidentals. She is much older than most 18 year olds I know, if you were to measure age by experiences lived, jobs worked or hardships faced. But still, she is only 18.

My daughter does not have a primary care doctor, while my two sons do. My daughter does not go to routine dental appointments, while my two sons do. My daughter does not have access to an ob/gyn who she can see on a regular basis and build up a relationship of trust with. She does not have access to mental health resources which I strongly believe she could benefit from. And the list goes on. It is quite a reality check for kids to discover that they have moved to this country with hopes and dreams but cannot access basic resources to care for their minds and bodies. And that on top of that, they are seen differently than their siblings.

The children and adults in our State deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. The families in our state deserve to have all of their children and parents have the same basic human rights as their neighbors and classmates down the street. We, as parents, should not have to be forced to explain to our children that they do not get the same level of health care as their brothers or sisters because of where they were born.

I support HB 6616 and I ask the committee to support and pass this legislation. Looking forward, I ask the committee to work towards opening access to all immigrants regardless of age.

Thank you for your time,
Mary Elizabeth Smith
Make the Road CT